



sweet maria's

coffee cupping reviews



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Central America: Honduras



Map of Honduras

Honduran coffee has been absent from the top ranks of the Specialty market, but that is all changing. It has all the environmental factors on its side: soil, altitude, climate. All its neighbors have sophisticated coffee production: Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. But what is lacking is infrastructure, good coffee processing and transporting, capital and a distinct "name" in the consumer market. This means that even a good quality Honduran does not fetch a good price (and in fact many from Copan and Santa Barbara districts are smuggled into Guatemala and sold as such). Without a premium price for quality, the incentive for the farmer, the mill and the exporter have no incentive to incur the added expense that would realize the coffee's potential. So Honduran coffee ends up as a good mild blender, and not as a single-origin or farm-specific coffee. It is, clearly, a vicious cycle.



Mayan Ruins at Copan

In 2003, I was able to judge at the first-ever Honduras Specialty Coffee Competition held in San Pedro Sula, and my ulterior motive on this trip was to find some truly special Honduran coffees for Sweet Maria's. I have always had the opinion that Honduras had all the geographic, climactic, geologic and cultural resources to produce great specialty coffee, but it stumped me why so much was flat-tasting, dull. The answer is that Honduras has not had the infrastructure and tradition to handle coffee with the care required to realize the cup quality potential. The main problem is that coffee cherry was partly processed, then sold wet to the mills - it would often ferment or mold before being correctly dried to 12%. If it survived the drying, then it might be badly dry-milled. If it was milled fine, then it was shipped to a boiling hot lowlands warehouse and ruined in storage. Even if it made it to a shipping container, it could be stalled at port and steamed in 100 degree weather. Not, with the help of USAID and Fintrac, along with coops like La Central, there is a huge educational push to produce better coffee and handle it so that the resulting cup quality is maximized. This involves a lot of investment in new equipment, and breaking of cost-cutting habits: not an easy thing to do in a low-priced coffee market where farmers are hardly covering the cost of production.

For our part, we are buying really good coffees and paying way over the Specialty prices. And still the retail price is remarkably low for really nice coffees! A big shout out goes to Tim at Volcafe Specialty for helping to bring in these small, special lots, and ensuring the high price to the farmers.

The largest growing region is Santa Barbara, as well as Copan, Ocotepeque, Lempira, La Paz and El Paraiso in the South. Coffee grown between 1500 and 2000 meters is given the highest designation of SHG; Strictly High Grown. The overall cup character is less acidic than other Central Americans, with distinct sweet caramel flavors in the cup. This makes the least acidic, clean cup profile coffees a tempting addition to espresso blends.

For more about Honduras, see my notes from the [2003 Honduras Specialty Coffee Competition](#), and my [2006 Honduras Cup of Excellence trip](#).

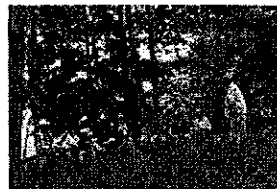
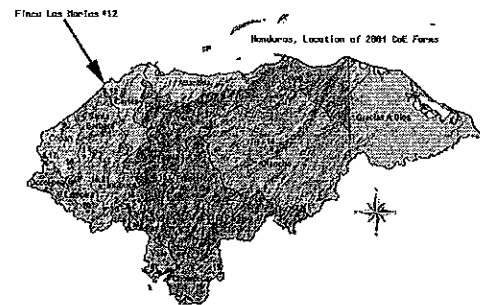


New coffee cherry

Current Crop Comments:

You can read my comments on overall crop quality from Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras and think I am repeating myself: an underrated origin. Honduras had problems overcoming its past: it was looked upon solely as a commercial coffee source. It is much more than that, and our Cup Of Excellence offerings the past 2 years underscore the fact. Like other origins, it is varied, so I can't speak about it as a single entity: coffees from Copan differ from Lempira or Santa Barbara or El Paraiso. In general, we have seen lower acidity from Hondurans lately and greater sweetness, which makes it a great choice as a Central component in espresso.

We have run out of the Nueve Posas coffee - but more Honduran coffees ought to be arriving as we get deeper into the season and possibly from the Cup of Excellence acution in mid-June. *Marla*



Training at Finca Nueve Posas